

Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. I liked one of the people whom Senator KENNEDY selected to give testimony, a lady from New York City. She was talking about the value of taking nontraditional jobs. She happened to be a stone mason, a person who works with bricks, rock, and marble. She makes things beautiful. She started with basic construction, and she worked her way up to where she was hanging marble on skyscrapers. She shared with us the progression in pay she had gotten. She is making more than I am. She made that progression rather rapidly, but she had to take a job that was nontraditional for women. She wears a hard hat and safety toes and goes up skyscrapers. You do not necessarily have to do that to make more money.

I always point out in Wyoming we have a shortage of people to work. That shortage is providing power for this country. Over a third of the coal that is mined in this country is mined in Campbell County, WY, which is where Gillette is. That is where I am from. Their problem now is getting people to drive haul trucks. They are big trucks. Two of them would not fit in this Chamber. They would be as high as the ceiling. They are big equipment. They have power steering, power brakes, enclosed cabs with air conditioning. They drive almost like a car. If a person can drive and pass a drug test, they can start at \$60,000 a year and get the training to work on that truck. That is way above minimum wage, folks. That is \$60,000 a year. If they want to put in some overtime—they would not be allowed flextime at the present time—they can make more than that.

We need to have people look at some of the nontraditional jobs and look at some of the other areas of the country. If they are in an area with a lot of people and not many jobs, they will have lower paying jobs. We need to get more job training. We need to have the people be where the good-paying jobs are. They would find pretty good quality of life, too.

I need to correct a couple of other things. First of all, we make some of these charts sound as if everyone working at minimum wage is a single mom with lots of kids. That does not fit with the statistics. There are 1.9 million people at the minimum wage. Fully 85 percent of the minimum wage earners live with their parents—I would think most of the parents hope that means they are teenagers—or they have a working spouse or are living alone without children. So 41 percent live with a parent or relative, 23 percent are single or are the sole breadwinner in a household with no children, and 21 percent live with another wage earner. A lot of those are teenagers. Yes, they are in poverty if that is all they are making.

I have had some minimum wage jobs. I don't know how many in this Chamber have had minimum wage jobs. I

worked in the summers and while I was going to college, even when I was considerably younger than that. One of the things I discovered was if I was interested in what I was doing and I learned as much as I could about it, I was not at the minimum wage very long. I got a promotion. I got more pay. But of course the reason I got more pay is because I was able to do more things. I was more skilled. Minimum wage equals minimum skills.

McDonald's takes a real rap for starting people at minimum wage, and I have a friend named Jack Preiss who owns several McDonald's. He pointed out to me he has three of his employees who started at minimum wage who now own 20 McDonald's.

That is the way we want America to work. We do not want minimum wage jobs that don't get you out of poverty. They keep you in poverty. Yes, we want higher skills, better jobs, and the opportunity for people to have higher wages. If people are locked into the fact they are going to have a minimum wage job their whole life, they are going to have a minimum wage job their whole life. But there are options. There are opportunities out there. And there could be more if we could do the Workforce Investment Act.

Flextime is one of six provisions in this bill that make a difference to small business.

I reserve the remainder of my time.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I rise today in strong support of Senator KENNEDY's amendment to increase the minimum wage. Not only is it the right thing to do for working families, but my State has shown that a living wage is compatible with a growing economy.

The facts speak for themselves, and they speak loudly. Let's just take three numbers: 9, 37, and 50.

Nine is the number of years since the minimum wage was last increased. This is the longest time the Nation has gone without raising the minimum wage since it was implemented in 1938. The real value of the current minimum wage is already \$4 below what it was in 1968.

Thirty-seven is the millions of Americans—37 million—who are currently living in poverty, including 13 million children.

Fifty is the percent by which poverty has increased in the past generation—freezing out an ever larger portion of our working citizens from the advantages of a higher standard of living that most of us enjoy.

I believe these numbers are a very strong signal that we are long past the time for the Nation, as a whole, to raise the level of the Federal minimum wage. I am proud that my home State of Washington has the highest minimum wage in the country, and it is indexed yearly to ensure that our workers are properly compensated for their hard work.

We in Washington State offer direct proof that a living minimum wage is compatible with a growing economy.

May marked our 34th consecutive month of job growth. Our unemployment rate, even with the highest minimum wage in the country, is essentially at the national average. Our poverty rate stands at 11 percent, which is significantly below the national average of 12.5 percent. Our median household income stands at \$48,000, much higher than the national average of \$43,000. Good labor policies make for good labor productivity and a healthy state economy.

Ever since the Fair Minimum Wage Act was passed in 1938, opponents have kept raising the same baseless arguments. Even 68 years ago, opponents tried to paint a bleak picture of disastrous effects, like "factories closed," "industries forced into bankruptcy," and "people who will be thrown out of employment." It wasn't true then. It is not true today. The fact is that this wage provides more economic opportunities for people to support their families and contribute to their communities.

Opponents often cite a negative impact on jobs as their prime argument to oppose an increase in the minimum wage. This tired argument is simply not true. In fact, the 4 years following our last minimum wage increase marked the strongest economic growth in three decades, creating almost 12 million new jobs. In contrast, during the past 4 years we have only seen the creation of about 4.7 million new jobs.

As elected representatives, it is our job not only to represent the people in our States, but also to stand up for the millions of Americans whose voices cannot be heard. Just since 2000, the number of Americans living in poverty has increased by a stunning 5.4 million people. A minimum wage employee, working 52 weeks a year for 40 hours a week, makes almost \$6,000 below the Federal poverty guidelines for a family of three. At this rate, it will be a long time before we see significant progress against the scourge of poverty for America's families.

By raising the minimum wage to \$7.25, we can put an extra \$4,400 a year into the pockets of these workers, enabling them to better support their families. This meager amount can make a world of difference to the poor among us. It could mean 19 months of utilities, 15 months of groceries, 8 months of rent or tuition for a community college degree. These are the basics, not the luxuries, of life today.

It is important to continually remind ourselves who is going to benefit from an increase. Here are some numbers to help set the record straight. This amendment will benefit nearly 15 million Americans, 80 percent of whom are adults, not teenagers trying to earn some extra spending money. In fact, more than one-third of these adults are the sole source of income for their families. And let's not forget the 7 million children of those minimum wage workers who will benefit from this increase.

This Congress has substantially cut the tax rates for the wealthiest people